

Message Text

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PAGE 01 HONG K 05292 271254Z
ACTION EA-12

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C O N F I D E N T I A L HONG KONG 5292

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ESOC, ELAB, EFIN, EEWT
SUBJECT: IMPORTED CONSUMER GOODS IN CANTON

1. SUMMARY: CANTON'S SHOPS ARE STOCKED WITH A LIMITED BUT STILL
SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT OF IMPORTED CONSUMER GOODS. ALTHOUGH THE
AMOUNT AND VARIETY OF IMPORTED CONSUMER GOODS IS PROBABLY
HIGHER IN CANTON THAN ELSEWHERE IN CHINA, SOME SUCH GOODS ARE
AVAILABLE IN OTHER LARGE CITIES. END SUMMARY

2. DURING THE PERIOD APRIL 14-25, USLO OFFICER OBSERVED
THAT JAPANESE-MADE COLOR TV SETS, HUNGARIAN TV SETS, JAPANESE-
MADE POLYESTER AND BLENDED PIECE GOODS, SWISS WATCHES AND "EXPORT-
ONLY" DOMESTICALLY-MADE GARMENTS WERE ON SALE IN CANTON'S DEPART-
MENT STORES. PRICES AND CONDITIONS OF SALE WERE SUCH AS TO
MAKE THESE ITEMS AVAILABLE TO A LARGE BUYING PUBLIC BUT PRICES
WERE VERY HIGH. SPECIFICALLY, AT LEAST TWENTY 24" COLOR TVS BEAR-
ING THE JAPANESE VIDEOTON BRAND NAME WERE BEING OFFERED FOR 2900
YUAN EACH. ONLY A WORK CERTIFICATE AND RESIDENCE
CERTIFICATE WERE REQUIRED FOR PURCHASE. (NOTE: THE WORK
CERTIFICATE REQUIREMENT DOES NOT IMPLY THAT THE SETS ARE
FOR SALE TO WORK UNITS ONLY.) THE HUNGARIAN 18" BLACK AND
WHITE SETS BORE A PRICE TAG OF 1300 YUAN. THE NOTICE STATED
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THAT THESE WERE FOR SALE TO INDIVIDUALS ONLY. JAPANESE-
MADE BOLTS, IN SOME CASES BRIGHTLY-COLORED POLYESTER, AND OTHER
SYNTHETIC CLOTH WERE DISPLAYED IN SEVERAL DOWNTOWN STORES AND
BUSINESS WAS GOOD. PRICES WERE HIGH -- 13 TO 16 YUAN PER
FOOT -- BUT RATION CARDS WERE NOT REQUIRED. SWISS WATCHES
PRICED FROM 200 TO 900 YUAN WERE ALSO BEING SOLD WITHOUT
RESTRICTION (EXCEPT PERHAPS THAT OF ONE PER CUSTOMER). IN

TWO DEPARTMENT STORES, SIGNS ADVERTISED "EXPORT GOODS FOR DOMESTIC SALE" AND IN ONE CASE THESE INCLUDED COTTON T-SHIRTS THAT WERE BEING OFFERED WITHOUT A RATION-CARD REQUIREMENT.

3. COMMENT: IT IS LIKELY THAT CANTON, AS THE COMMERCIAL CENTER OF SOUTH CHINA'S "REMITTANCE ECONOMY," IS OFFERING MORE IMPORTED CONSUMER GOODS THAN OTHER CHINESE CITIES AS A WAY OF ATTRACTING MORE REMITTANCES. STILL, "EXPORT ONLY" TEXTILES AND IMPORTED WATCHES HAVE ALSO BEEN OBSERVED IN WUHAN, TAIYUAN AND ELSEWHERE. AT THE VERY LEAST, THESE IMPORTS WILL SOAK UP MUCH URBAN PURCHASING POWER WHICH HAS GROWN SINCE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL INDUSTRIAL WAGE INCREASE.

LEVIN

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